

R. Rawls of Northampton, and W. Lee Person of Edgecombe.<sup>27</sup>

In his inaugural address and first actions as governor, Russell indicated to North Carolinians that he intended to continue the trend established in the previous legislature. He would seek to revamp local governments, involving the state in municipal affairs. Furthermore, he spoke of his determination to involve the state in the control of the North Carolina Railroad. A plan to lease the use, care, and profit of the railroad to the Southern Railway was endorsed by Governor Carr before leaving office. Russell, in his inaugural address, made it clear that he would not allow the lease unless adequate compensation was paid to the state. The railroad issue would prove to be troublesome for Russell's administration and plagued most of his term. The railroad issue, coupled with other reforms, was seen by Russell as a means to combat big business.<sup>28</sup>

As soon as the second Fusionist legislature was in session, the tenuous bonds of cooperation were shaken by Russell's divisive appointment of Populist Jeter Pritchard to the U. S. Senate. Partisanship

began to plague all activity. Again, the Fusionists sought to make changes to election laws and local governments so as to hamper efforts of Democrats to challenge voter eligibility and election outcomes.<sup>29</sup>

### Fusion Focus on Wilmington

The legislature turned its attention to managing the state's municipalities, among them Wilmington. Although black Republicans had a voter majority in the city, the gerrymandered wards provided a block to their collective voting power. The Fusionists wanted to provide more voice to Wilmington Republicans, but, at the same time, wanted to limit black voter strength in order to prevent a black majority on the Board of Aldermen. The Fusionists hoped that limiting black power would deprive Democrats of a potential campaign issue. The solution developed by the Fusionists as they amended the charter was to establish a Board of Aldermen drawn from both gubernatorial appointments and elections. It was hoped that Russell's ability to place aldermen on the board would counterbalance fears whites had about black rule and the notion that blacks would elect men to office who were "propertyless and ignorant." The resulting changes to Wilmington's city charter reflected Fusionist sentiment. Ward lines were not changed, but voters elected one alderman from each ward and the governor appointed the other five aldermen. Once the new Board of Aldermen reflected the Fusion shift, the Police Board, no longer needed to limit the board's authority, was abolished by the legislature in favor of the Board of Audit and Finance.<sup>30</sup> Other Fusionist measures

<sup>27</sup> In an attempt to counter losses to Fusionists in 1896, Democratic Party leaders successfully petitioned Superior Court Judge E. T. Boykin to appoint W. F. Alexander and Roger Moore to the County Board of Commissioners. The petition stated that the Democratic petitioners expressed their concerns that the "business of the County of New Hanover if left entirely in the hands of the three Commissioners elected at the last election will be improperly managed and that 200 citizens of the said County Elections... request the appoint of two honest and discreet citizens ... of opposite party from the majority of the present Board of Commissioners." New Hanover County Election Records, 1882-1896, State Archives, North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh; McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 447-448; Edmonds, *Negro and Fusion Politics*, 56-60, 65-66; Crow, *African Americans in North Carolina*, 233-5.

<sup>28</sup> Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 81-87.

<sup>29</sup> Edmonds, *Negro and Fusion Politics*, 62-64.

<sup>30</sup> Fusionists focused on other towns as well to deny Democrats control in North Carolina urban areas. There were three groups of cities that were targeted by the fusionists. First to see charter changes were